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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000580

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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [PTER](#) [TSPL](#) [ETTC](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PROGRESS UNDER THE BIOSECURITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Classified by: Deputy Chief of Mission Peter W. Bodde for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: ISN/CTR Deputy Director Dr. Jason Rao arrived in Islamabad January 10 for an extended TDY to further the Department's Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) in Pakistan and establish a field office within Embassy Islamabad. Since his arrival, Dr. Rao has furthered the development of collaborative programs under BEP with several Ministries, universities and research institutes. This is the first in a series of five thematic cables outlining BEP progress in Pakistan. Subsequent cables will look at public health infrastructure development, avian influenza surveillance, support for the U.S.-Pakistan science and technology agreement and a readout of a BEP site visit to Lahore. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) received USD 26 million for global programs in FY 2008, and is charged with denying terrorist access to potentially dangerous pathogens and expertise. Pakistan is one of the program's top priorities. BEP works to strengthen laboratory security to provide a safe and sustainable public health infrastructure and develop general science and technology collaboration. BEP supports collaborative research and development projects with several USG agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), the CDC, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Department of Defense Navy Medical Research Units 2 and 3 (NAMRU 2 and 3) and the Armed Forces Research Institute for Medical Sciences.

ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL OFFICE

¶3. (SBU) BEP staff members traveled to Pakistan twice in 2007, visiting a range of facilities and providing training on laboratory safety to more than 800 scientists in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Participants from labs across Pakistan expressed interest in further collaboration with the U.S. As a result of this interest, a BEP field office is being established within Embassy Islamabad to further USG engagement with Pakistan's scientific community on biosafety and biosecurity issues. The Field Office will provide targeted assistance to Pakistan's highest priority labs, provide biosecurity-specific technical assistance to the Government of Pakistan (GOP) and fund grants under the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology (S&T) agreement.

¶4. (SBU) The Embassy Islamabad-based BEP field office, like similar BEP facilities in Jakarta and Manila, will conduct operations across the country. Local staff will be employed to oversee daily BEP activities in Pakistan as well as liaise with Washington. A BEP regional resource center is planned for Bangkok and will serve Pakistan as well as Southeast Asia. Local BEP field offices in Islamabad, Jakarta and Manila will feed into the regional resource

center to provide long-term engagement and collaboration on biosafety and biosecurity programs.

CONSTRUCTION OF BIOSAFETY LEVEL 3 LABS

15. (S) GOP health authorities are moving quickly to construct biosafety level 3 (BSL3) labs in response to heightened awareness of the threat of pandemic influenza and endemic infectious diseases. Dr. Rao has met with representatives from both the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MINFAL) to discuss collaboration on secure and sustainable public health infrastructure development. The MOH is seeking to collaborate with the U.S. on national guidelines for biosafety and biosecurity and has asked that U.S. technical teams be integrated into a BSL3 lab currently under construction at the National Institute of Health in Islamabad. Representatives from the Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) and the Pakistan Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, under the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), are also interested in biosafety and biological and chemical weapons detection and response training. BEP is developing a series of programs and exchanges with GOP ministries, including a national survey of potentially dangerous pathogens.

NEXT STEPS: EXCHANGES

16. (SBU) BEP is planning to bring small technical assistance teams from the U.S. National Labs, USGS, Harvard/Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), NAMRU 3, CDC and USDA to Islamabad over the next five months to take advantage of the TDY ISN Deputy Director. Areas of immediate interest include BSL3 laboratory design assistance and national biosafety standards development, including personnel reliability programs. In addition, BEP is sponsoring Pakistani scientists for safety and security training and has extended

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invitations to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and the Ministry of Science and Technology. BEP also plans to send Pakistani scientists to participate in CDC biosafety training in Atlanta, the March 2008 Asia Pacific Biosafety Association meeting in Bangkok, specialized tuberculosis training at Harvard/Massachusetts General Hospital and avian influenza diagnostic training from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Extended BEP presence in Islamabad has already made an impact on the Department's ability to sustain a dialogue on issues surrounding biological security and bioterrorism. The GOP continues to respond favorably to BEP assistance, and has shown transparency and made concerted efforts to collaborate on a wide range of projects. The BEP field office will be essential in maintaining a consistent dialogue with Pakistani interlocutors on biosafety and biosecurity issues, and allow continued coordination of related efforts out of Embassy Islamabad.

PATTERSON